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Marvin Gaye: Honor Thy Brother-In-Law, by Ben Fong-Torres ❦ Mick Jagger, Main Street Exile ❦❦❦ Plus – LATE FLASH: Fear & Loathing in Wisconsin

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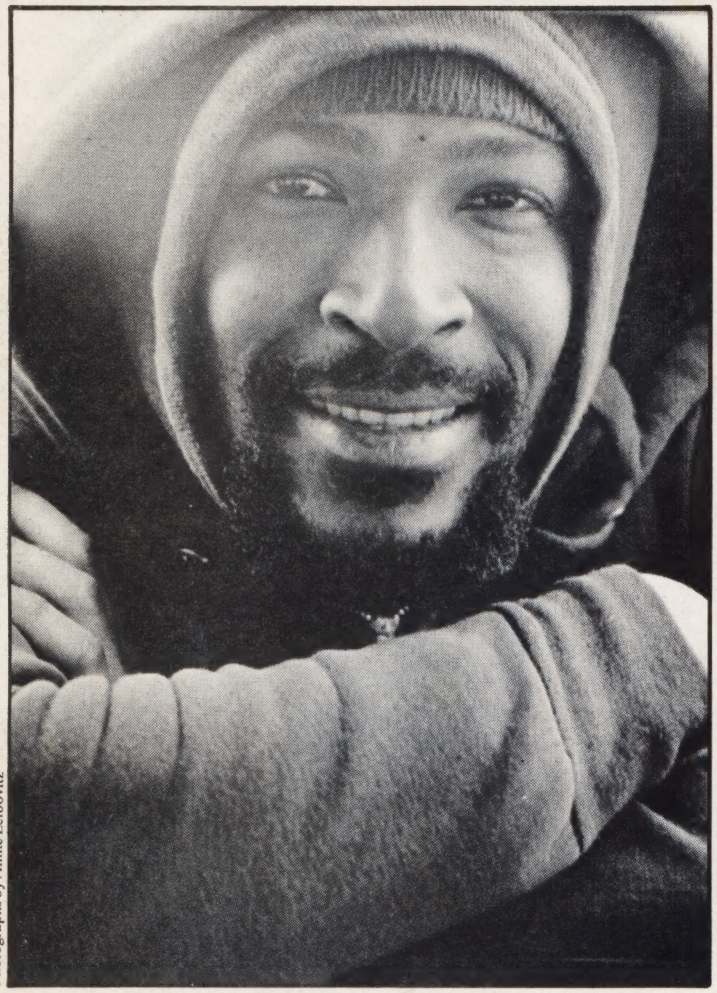

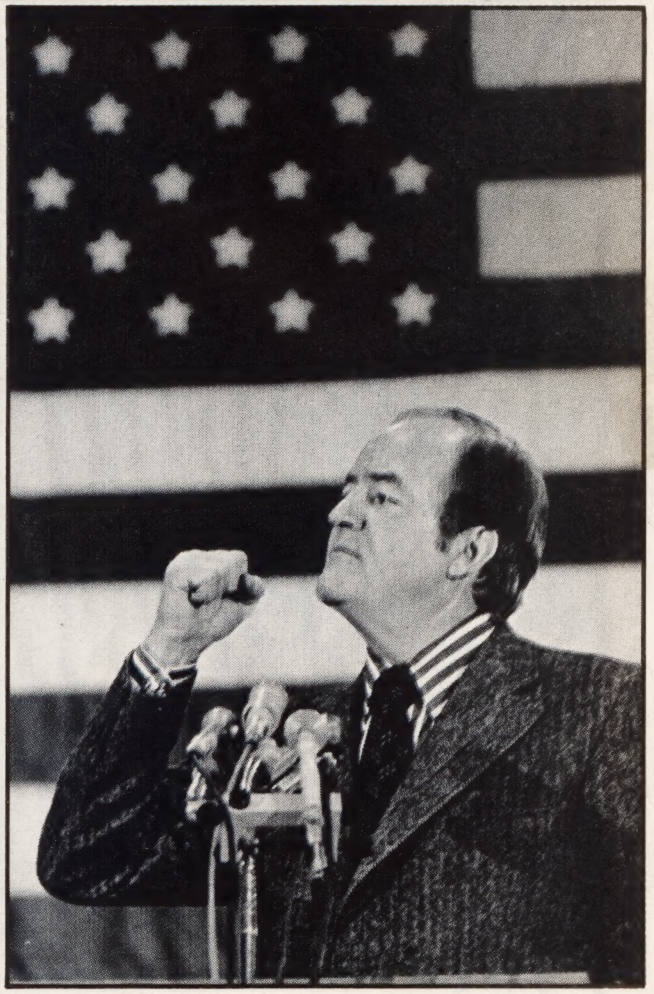

Photographs by Annie Leibovitz

Dripping Springs: Grover Lewis covers the greatest and most screwed-up country/western festival in history ❦ Bill Graham and the American Pie ❦❦

Fear & Loathing in Wisconsin:

Bad News From Bleak House: Total Failure in Milwaukee...or, How Nazis Broke My Spirit on Election Night...With A Few Quick Thoughts on The Shocking Victory of Double-George...

by
Hunter S. Thompson

Failure comes easy at a time like this. After eight days in this fantastic dungeon of a hotel, the idea of failing totally and miserably in my work seems absolutely logical. It is a fitting end to this gig—not only for me, but for everyone else who got trapped here, especially journalists.

The Wisconsin Primary is over now. It came to a shocking climax a few hours ago when George McGovern and George Wallace ran a blitz on everybody.

The results were such a jolt to the Conventional Wisdom that now—with a cold grey dawn bloating up out of Lake Superior and Hubert Humphrey still howling in his sleep despite the sedatives in his room directly above us—there is nobody in Milwaukee this morning, including me, who can even pretend to explain what really went down last night. The McGovern braintrust will deny this, but the truth of the matter is that less than 24 hours ago it was impossible to get an even-money bet in McGovern headquarters that their man would finish first. Not even Warren Beatty, who is blossoming fast in his new role as one of McGovern's most valuable and enthusiastic organizers, really believed that George would finish any better than a close second.

A week earlier it would have been considered a sign of madness, among those who knew the score, to bet McGovern any better than a respectable third—but toward the end of the final week the word went out that George had picked up a wave and was showing surprising strength in some of the blue-collar, hard-hat wards that had been more or less conceded to either Humphrey or Muskie. David Broder of the Washington Post is generally acknowledged to be the ranking wizard on the campaign trail this year, and five days before the election he caused serious shock waves by offering to bet — with me, at least—that McGovern would get more than 30 percent, and Wallace less than 10.

He lost both ends of that bet, as it turned out — and I mean to hunt the bastard down and rip his teeth out if he tries to welsh—but the simple fact that Broder had that kind of confidence in McGovern's strength was seen as a main signal by the professional pols and newsmen who'd been saying all along that the Wisconsin primary was so hopelessly confused that nobody in his right mind would try to predict the outcome.

The consensus outlook, however, had Humphrey winning with almost 30 percent, McGovern just barely edging Muskie out of second with just under 25 percent, and fourth going to either Jackson or Wallace at roughly 10 percent.

My own bets had Humphrey hanging on to beat McGovern just barely, by something like 27 percent to 26 percent, Wallace a strong third with about 20 percent, and poor Muskie crawling in a sick fourth with about 10 percent to Jackson's 9 percent. I was sorely tempted to pickup up some easy money from Tom Morgan, Lindsay's press secretary, who emptied his pockets one afternoon in the Schroeder hotel bar and came up with $102 to back his conviction that Lindsay would get between 10 percent and 15 percent—but I had to back off because I had come to like Lindsay; he struck me as the most interesting of all the Democratic candidates in the sense that he seemed open to almost any kind of idea . . . so I regretfully declined Morgan's bet on the grounds that I would feel a bit uncomfortable by profiting from Lindsay's misfortune. (As it turned out, he got only 7 percent and dropped out. . . .)

But this was not the story I meant to write—or avoid writing—here; the idea was to say only that we suffered a terrible disaster on election night. All our finely-laid plans were blasted into offal by the TV network computers before the night even got into first gear.

When the polls closed at 8, Tim Crouse and I were still sitting idly around the T-shaped bar and desk in our National Affairs Suite at the Sheraton-Schroeder Hotel, laying detailed plans for what we assumed would be the next five or six hours of hellish suspense while the votes were being counted. It would be at least midnight, we felt, before the results would begin to take shape . . . and if it looked at all close we were prepared to work straight through until dawn or even noon, if necessary.

The lead article in Sunday's Washington Post echoed the unanimous conviction of all the five or six hundred big-time press / politics wizards who were gathered here for what they all called "the crunch" — the showdown, the first of the national primaries that would finally separate the sheep from the goats, as it were.

After a month of intense research by some of the best political journalists in America, the Post had finally concluded that (1) "The Wisconsin primary election seems likely to make dramatic changes in the battle for the 1972 presidential nomination" . . . and (2), that "an unusually high degree of uncertainty remains as the contest nears its climax."

In other words, nobody had the vaguest idea what would happen here, except that some people were going to get hurt—and the smart-money consensus had Muskie and Lindsay as the most likely losers. The fact that Lindsay was almost totally out of money made him a pretty safe bet to do badly in Wisconsin, but Muskie—coming off a convincing victory in Illinois at least partially redeemed his disastrous failure in Florida—looked pretty good in Wisconsin, on paper, but there was still something weak and malignant in the spine of the Muskie campaign. There was a smell of death about it. He talked like a farmer with terminal cancer trying to borrow money on next year's crop.

Two weeks before the election the polls had Muskie running more or less even with Humphrey and well ahead of McGovern—but not even his staffers believed it; they kept smiling, but their morale had been cracked beyond repair in Florida, when Muskie called a meeting the day after the primary to announce that he was quitting the race. They had managed to talk him not of it, agreeing to work without pay until after Wisconsin, but when word of the candidate's aborted withdrawal leaked out to the press . . . well, that was that. Nobody published it, nobody mentioned it on TV or radio—and, from that point on, the only thing that kept the Muskie campaign alive was a grim political version of the old vaudeville idea that "the show must go on."

Midway in the final week of the campaign even Muskie himself began dropping hints that he knew he was doomed. At one point, during a whistle-stop tour of small towns in the Fox River Valley near Green Bay, he fell into a public funk and began muttering about "needing a miracle" . . . and then, when the sense of depression began spreading like a piss-puddle on concrete, he invited the campaign-press regulars to help him celebrate his 58th birthday at a small hotel on a snowy night in Green Bay (see insert below). But the party turned sour when his wife mashed a piece of the birthday cake in the face of a Newsweek reporter, saying, "One good turn deserves another, eh?"

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The final straw, for Muskie, was the result of an unpublished but carefully leaked poll, taken by Oliver Quayle at the behest of Senator Jackson and the local AFL-CIO that showed Muskie losing 70 percent of his support in Wisconsin in a period of two weeks. According to the Quayle poll, the onetime front-runner slipped from 39% to 13%, while McGovern was virtually doubling *his* figure from 12% to 23% in the same period—which put McGovern ahead of Humphrey, who had dropped about five points to 19%.

The same poll showed George Wallace with 12%, which convinced both the Governor and Organized Labor that it would not be necessary to mount a serious effort to short-circuit the Wallace threat. Both the Governor and the state Labor Bosses had been worried about Wallace stomping into Wisconsin and embarrassing everybody by pulling off another one of those ugly, Florida-style upsets.

It is still very hard to understand how the polls and the pols and especially a wizard like Broder could have so drastically underestimated the Wallace vote. Perhaps the threat of an anti-Wallace backlash by organized labor led the visiting press to think the other was safely boxed in. Wisconsin's Big Labor braintrust had come up with a theory that said Wallace got a huge boost, in Florida, by the fact that the liberal opposition got so hysterical about him that he got twice as many votes as he would have, if the other candidates had simply ignored him and done their own things.

So they decided to turn the other cheek in Wisconsin. They ignored the Wallace rallies that, night after night, packed halls in every corner of the state. That was all Wallace did — except for a few TV spots — and every one of his rallies attracted far more people than the hall could hold.

I went to one at a place called Serb Hall on the South Side of Milwaukee — a neighborhood the pols said was locked up for Muskie. Serb Hall is a big yellow-brick place that looks like an abandoned gymnasium, across the street from Sentry Supermarket on Oklahoma St. about five miles from downtown Milwaukee. One half of the hall is a "Lounge & Bowling Alley," and the other half is a fair-sized auditorium with a capacity of about 300.

The Serb Hall rally was a last minute addition to the Wallace schedule. His main rally that night was scheduled for a much bigger hall in Racine, about 50 miles south at 7:30 . . . but one of his handlers apparently decided to get him warmed up with a 5:00 gig at Serb Hall, despite the obvious risk involved in holding a political rally at that hour of the evening in a neighborhood full of Polish factory-workers just getting off work.

I got there at 4:30, thinking to get in ahead of the crowd and maybe chat a bit with some of the early arrivals at the bar . . . but at 4:30 the hall was already packed and the bar was so crowded that I could barely reach in to get a beer. When I reached in again, to pay for it, somebody pushed my hand back and a voice said "It's already taken care of, fella — you're a *guest* here."

For the next two hours I was locked in a friendly, free-wheeling conversation with about six of my hosts who didn't mind telling me that they were there because George Wallace was the most important man in America. "This guy is the real thing," one of them said. "I never cared anything about politics before, but Wallace ain't the same as the others. He don't sneak around the bush. He just comes right out and *says* it."

It was the first time I'd ever seen Wallace in person. There were no seats in the hall; everybody was standing. The air was electric even before he started talking, and by the time he was five or six minutes into his spiel I had a sense that the bastard had somehow levitated himself and was hovering over us. It reminded me of a Janis Joplin concert. Anybody who doubts the Wallace appeal should go out and catch his act sometime. He jerked this crowd in Serb Hall around like he had them all on wires. They were laughing, shouting, whacking each other on the back . . . It was a flat-out fire & brimstone *performance.*

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But that's another story, too. The deadline-mongers are screaming at me again. I have something like six minutes before this thing has to go out on the Mojo wire, so the Wallace trip will have to wait for next time around.

There is also the fact that I am feeling a little desperate about getting out of this hotel. Eight days in the Sheraton Schroeder is like three months in the Cook County jail. The place is run by old Germans. The whole staff is German. Most of them speak enough English to make themselves understood in a garbled, menacing sort of way . . . and they are especially full of hate this week because the hotel has just been sold and the whole staff seems to think they'll be fired just as soon as the election crowd leaves.

So they are doing everything possible to make sure that nobody unfortunate enough to be trapped here this week will ever forget the experience. The room radiators are uncontrollable, the tubs won't drain, the elevators go haywire every night, the phones ring for no reason at all hours of the night, the coffee shop is almost never open, and about three days before the election the bar ran out of beer. The manager explained that they were "runnig oud zee inventory" — selling off everything in stock, including all the booze and almost every item on the menu except things like cabbage and sauerbratten. The first wave of complaints were turned aside with a hiss and a chop of the hand, but after two days and nights of this Prussian madness the manager was apparently caused to know pressure from forces beyond his control. By Friday the bar was stocked with beer again, and it was once more possible to get things like prime rib and sheep's head in the dining room.

But the root *ambience* of the place never changed. Dick Tuck, the legendary Kennedy advance man now working for McGovern has stayed here several times in the past and calls it "the worst hotel in the world."

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Ah yes . . . I can hear the Mojo wire humming frantically across the room. Crouse is stuffing page after page of gibberish into it. Greg Jackson, the ABC correspondent, had been handling it most of the day and whipping us along like Bear Bryant, but he had to catch a plane for New York and now we are left on our own.

The pressure is building up. The copy no longer makes sense. Huge chunks are either missing or too scrambled to follow from one sentence to another. Crouse just fed two consecutive pages into the machine upside-down, provoking a burst of angry yelling from whoever is operating the receiver out there on the Coast.

And now the bastard is beeping . . . beeping . . . beeping, which means it is hungry for this final page, which means I no longer have time to crank out any real wisdom on the meaning of the Wisconsin primary. But that can wait, I think. We have a three-week rest, now, before the next one of these goddamn nightmares . . . which gives me a bit of time to think about what happened here. Meanwhile, the only thing we can be absolutely sure of is that George McGovern is no longer the hopelessly decent loser that he has looked like up to now.

The real surprise of this campaign, according to Theodore White on CBS-TV last night, is that "George McGovern has turned out to be one of the great field organizers of American politics."

But Crouse is dealing with that story, and the wire is beeping again. So this page will have to go, for good or ill . . . and the minute it finishes we will flee this hotel like rats from a burning ship.

The only other problem will be to figure out the meaning of the strange relationship between George McGovern and George Wallace . . . but that will take some time. Selah.